



JOSEPH R. BIDEN, III
ATTORNEY GENERAL

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
820 NORTH FRENCH STREET
WILMINGTON, DELAWARE 19801

CONTACT JASON MILLER
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
PHONE (302) 577-8949
CELL (302) 893-8939
Jason.Miller@state.de.us

Media Release

January 11, 2012

Attorney General Biden Leads Call for Congress to Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act

Continued federal support essential to protecting families nationwide

Wilmington – Delaware Attorney General Beau Biden and Maine Attorney General William J. Schneider led an effort joined by 51 of their fellow state and territorial Attorneys General to call on the U.S. Congress to reauthorize the federal Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”) and ensure that vital programs working to keep women and families safe from violence and abuse continue uninterrupted.

“The fight to protect women from violence is an ongoing battle, not a year-to-year issue,” said Attorney General Biden. “I urge congress to reauthorize VAWA so we can build on the lessons and achievements of the past 17 years and reach the millions of individuals and families who continue to need these life-saving services.”

Carol Post, Executive Director of the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence, also stressed the importance of reauthorization. “The Violence Against Women Act has been truly transformative and has impacted every level of our society's response to domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking,” Post said. “It is imperative that VAWA be reauthorized so that critical services for victims are maintained and vital partnerships with prosecutors, the courts and law enforcement are continued so that perpetrators are held accountable and victims are better protected from further abuse. The work will not be finished until we end the violence.”

In a letter sent today to members of Congress, the Attorneys General state that since the initial passage of VAWA in 1994, the national response to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking has been transformed. Crimes that used to be considered private, family matters to be dealt with behind closed doors have been brought out of the darkness and the results have been dramatic. But while national rates of domestic violence have dropped by over 50% in the past 17 years, the issues addressed by VAWA are still very much at the forefront of the crime fight. Tragically, three women are killed each day in the United States by abusive husbands and partners, and for every victim who loses her life, there are nine more who narrowly escape. Attorney General Biden noted a recent tragedy in Delaware in which a young mother was beaten to death by her ex-boyfriend while her three children watched.

Citing the need to maintain services to victims and families on the local, state, and federal level, the Attorneys General called on Congress to pass legislation reauthorizing VAWA. They noted that reauthorization would not only allow existing programs to continue uninterrupted, but would also

provide for the development of new initiatives aimed at key areas most in need of intervention. These initiatives include:

- *Strengthening prevention and intervention programs.* Domestic violence, dating violence and sexual assault are most prevalent among women aged 16-24. Programs will work to combat attitudes among youth which are tolerant toward violence and break the cycle in which women who experience abuse as teens are more likely to be victimized again as adults.
- *Improving the response to sexual assault* by ensuring coordination among the healthcare, law enforcement, and legal services a victim encounters after an assault to effectively prosecute perpetrators and help victims heal and rebuild their lives.
- *Preventing domestic violence homicides* by enhancing training for law enforcement, advocates, and others who interact with those at risk. A growing number of experts and researchers agree that these homicides are predictable – and therefore preventable – if we know the warning signs.

The Attorneys General closed their letter to Congress by recalling that when VAWA was first passed in 1994, it was recognition that domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking are pervasive issues affecting individuals, families and communities across the nation. They note that the progress that has resulted from strong federal support has been tremendous, but that the struggle goes on. Reauthorizing VAWA, Biden wrote, will send a clear message that this country does not tolerate violence against women and show Congress' commitment to reducing domestic violence, protecting women from sexual assault and securing justice for victims.

In addition to Delaware and Maine, the states and territories signing on to the letter include: American Samoa, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virgin Islands, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

A copy of the letter is attached

#